

Larry Lipman

Anti-Semitism not a war of words

Is the sharp rise of anti-Semitism in Europe a "wave"?

That's the question arising from a meeting last month between members of the House International Relations Committee and Javier Solana, the high representative of the European Union (akin to a foreign minister).

When committee members asked him about the "wave of anti-Semitism" in Europe, he said that he did not believe such a "wave" exists.

Rep. Robert Wexler, D-Delray Beach, and other panel members were stunned.

In a sharply worded letter last week, Rep. Wexler — joined by Reps. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, R-Miami, and Tom Lantos of California, a Holocaust survivor and the committee's ranking Democrat, used a battery of statistics to back up their assertion that a wave does exist.

Among the letter's most disturbing conclusions is that the increase in anti-Semitism worldwide has shifted in recent years away from totalitarian countries to democracies, most of them in Western Europe.

"Most anti-Semitic violence in 2002 occurred in Western Europe" the letter said, citing a report by the Stephen Roth Institute for the Study of Contemporary Anti-Semitism and Racism at Tel Aviv University.

Last year, 31 of the 56 anti-Semitic attacks worldwide in which a weapon was used, and 147 of the 225 attacks without the use of a weapon, took place in Western Europe, according to the study. This was a sharp increase from previous years. Between 1999 and 2002, there was a 75 percent increase in attacks with a weapon and a 97 percent increase in weaponless attacks in Western Europe.

"In our opinion, such a dramatic rise can be classified as nothing less



than a 'wave,' " the letter said.

The forms of anti-Semitism have been widespread and violent. According to the letter, it has been manifest by "the burning of synagogues, desecration of Jewish cemeteries and assaults targeting Jews or those presumed to be Jewish."

The attacks have included "physical assaults, fire-bombings, gunfire, window-smashing (of Jewish businesses) vandalism of Jewish homes, schools, synagogues and community institutions. Vandals have desecrated scores of Jewish cemeteries across the region, daubing slogans, threats and Nazi symbols on walls and monuments, while toppling and shattering tombstones."

The recent rise in Western European anti-Semitism has coincided with the resumption of the intifada and Israel's often harsh retaliations. Some European governments have cited the Mideast turmoil as an excuse for what is happening on their soil. The letter by Rep. Wexler and others denounces this practice.

Criticism of Israel and its policies "are not inherently anti-Semitic," the letter states, but when

they "surface in the form of violence or nonviolent attacks against Jews" in general, they become a form of racial discrimination. Further, when these practices are continuously accepted, ignored or justified by European governments, it creates an atmosphere in which anti-Semitism is tolerated and fostered."

Rep. Wexler and other panel member intend to pursue this issue further. They have invited former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani to a briefing, probably this fall. Mr. Giuliani headed an American delegation to a meeting last month of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe which focused on the problem of anti-Semitism.

Among the U.S. delegation was Rep. Alcee Hastings, D-Miramar, who gave a speech there strongly denouncing anti-Semitism and urging the 55-member organization to take steps to monitor and curb incidents. Rep. Hastings and other delegation members also are expected to be invited to the briefing.

In the meantime, Rep. Wexler's letter urges the European Union to follow the U.S. lead in establishing jurisdiction for and prosecuting hate crimes — specifically those targeted against Jews. The letter also calls for the release of a suppressed report on anti-Semitism conducted by the European Union Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia.

Mindful that Jews in Western Europe were being persecuted and exterminated only six decades ago, the letter urges Mr. Solana to "lead the EU in a concerted effort to combat this growing threat to humanity so that the promise of 'never again' may be fulfilled."

Larry Lipman is Washington bureau chief for The Palm Beach Post. His e-mail address is larryl@coxnews.com

PBP 7/22/03 p.8A